

# **STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD CONGRESSMAN NEIL ABERCROMBIE**

Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human  
Resources  
House Committee on Government Reform

## **“The Poisoning of Paradise: Crystal Methamphetamine in Hawaii” August 2, 2004**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing into the unique impact of crystal methamphetamine or “ice” on Hawaii’s population. The natural beauty of Hawaii can often hide the problems we face from visitors and residents alike. However, in recent years the effects of rampant ice abuse have become very visible and all too common.

The State of Hawaii’s 2005 Threat Assessment ranked crystal methamphetamine as the single most significant drug problem and the most widely abused illicit drug. Like most areas of the United States, demand for the drug as well as the associated violence is on the rise. Unlike other places, Hawaii is the only location I know of where crystal methamphetamine also outstrips alcohol, a legal drug, as a threat to society.

As an example of this drug’s prolific presence, Hawaii leads the nation with 42% of arrested men testing positive for crystal methamphetamine use. Hawaii also has the highest rate of adults who have tried crystal methamphetamine. This high rate of use has the accompanying physiological effects and increase in child abuse, domestic violence, homicide and property crime. A 1% increase in Hawaii’s crystal methamphetamine addiction rate equates to 920 new child abuse cases. These 920 cases are not just a statistic, they also create high risk youths with a higher propensity to addiction, crime and violence.

Part of the reason for the intense crystal methamphetamine problem in Hawaii is our geographical location in the Pacific Basin. We are a midway point between Asia and the mainland United States and a natural stopping point for shipments, legal and illegal. Drugs from Asia, Mexico, Canada and the mainland U.S. all make their way to Hawaii en route to their eventual destination. With 28 million packages delivered into the state and over one million takeoffs and landings at our airports last year alone, there are difficult odds for drug interdiction.

To combat these difficulties, the entire State of Hawaii has been designated a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA). The Hawaii HIDTA pools together our limited federal resources to ensure a targeted and organized response to the immense drug flow in Hawaii. In 2003, HIDTA was able to disrupt or dismantle 34 drug trafficking organizations and has already designated priority targets among the

organizations that are still operational. The knowledge our HIDTA has been able to gain has been immense and extremely helpful in understanding how the drug trade in the Pacific operates. This knowledge is also used by the groups and organizations that focus on the other aspects of combating crystal methamphetamine: prevention and treatment.

I cannot emphasize enough the impact that our law enforcement in Hawaii and especially HIDTA has had on our fight against crystal methamphetamine. These operations need continued support and funding from the federal government. Currently, our HIDTA has been level funded at \$2.5 million a year. There is also legislation pending in Congress that would reform the HIDTA structure to one that is tiered. As currently proposed, this would rank the Hawaii HIDTA in the last tier with a lowered funding level. I understand the havoc that crystal methamphetamine is wreaking every state. But I believe putting the Hawaii HIDTA in the lowest tier does not take into account our natural positioning to stop drugs from Asia and other parts of the world from ever reaching the U.S. mainland. Moreover, this would seriously diminish the influence and reach of the Hawaii HIDTA to other Pacific countries and also the U.S. territories of Guam, American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands. Continued operations need to be increased and expanded rather than decreased or downsized.

Our communities and state government are involved and proactive in this problem. One of the more successful cooperative efforts is the creation of an award winning documentary of the crystal methamphetamine problem in the islands. This hour long piece was simulcast, commercial free, on 11 television stations statewide. The public's reaction to this documentary has been so positive that a sequel is currently being produced. The State of Hawaii and its people are engaged and trying to make inroads into the crystal methamphetamine epidemic. I urge you, Mr. Chairman, to continue the strong federal presence in Hawaii to support the hard work we are trying to accomplish.

Again, mahalo for convening this hearing and taking the time to witness the effects of crystal methamphetamine here in Hawaii.